



On Christ the Solid Rock We Stand?

"We have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world."

John the Apostle, 1 John 4:14

"A world at peace... That dream has not yet come, it will not come true soon, but if it ever does come true, it will be brought into being by American armed might, and defended by American might. America's vocation is not an imperial vocation...it is a vocation that has made us, at our best moments, the hope of the world."

Richard Perle & David Frum,
An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror (Ballantine, 2004)

The treasured lyrics of 19th-century pastor Edward Mote declare, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' name." Sung to this day with great emotion in American church pews, this great hymn is unequivocal in its message: There is no hope apart from Jesus Christ. Echoed in countless classic hymns and modern praise choruses, the assertion that Jesus is the sole source of hope and salvation is presumably what makes an evangelical an evangelical. Whether Fanny Crosby, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Amy Grant, or Psalty the Talking Hymnal, we have always been in agreement: Jesus is the answer.

Clear about who our Savior is, we confidently unmask the counterfeits. The drug dealer promises deliverance in the form of crystal meths. The mass media encourages young people to find fulfill-

ment in sex. Corporate workaholics seek salvation in stress-producing ladder-climbing. We appropriately denounce such false gods, warning their worshippers that they are building their house on sinking sand. Destruction awaits those whose hope is placed in someone, or something, other than Jesus Christ. But what if the folks we care about are being told that America is the hope of the world?

Such a messianic claim is exactly what Washington neoconservatives Perle and Frum preach in *An End to Evil*, a book touted as a "bold program to defend America, and win the war on terror." They are unabashedly clear in their conviction that the hope of the world hinges on the advance of American ideals backed by decisive use of American military force. Perle and Frum, who served respectively as chairman of the influential Defense Policy Board and Oval Office speechwriter, played key roles in shaping our present U.S. foreign policy.

They are joined by many others of neoconservative persuasion—including Paul Wolfowitz (now heading the World Bank), John Bolton (now at the U.N.), Douglas Feith (defense undersecretary), I. Lewis Libby (vice presidential chief of staff), Irving Kristol, William Kristol, Michael Ledeen, and Charles Krauthammer—who have aggressively promoted their perspectives through such entities as the American Enterprise Institute (www.aei.org), the Project for a New American Century (www.newamericancentury.org), *Commentary*, the *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard* and, increasingly, the large media organizations, ranging from Fox News to National Public Radio. Their collective prescription for a safer and better world is remarkably reflected in the official *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, published by the White House in September 2002 (www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html).

Belief in America as world savior is not, of course, original with present-day

neoconservatives. Such notions have fueled the political rhetoric of many former administrations, both Democratic and Republican, predating even the Puritan vision of America as the New Israel, a "city on a hill"; the grand, sweeping aspirations of Jeffersonian democracy; and the benevolent expansionist ideology of Manifest Destiny. But the most recent soliloquy of America in messianic terms came on the first anniversary of 9/11 when our president proclaimed in front of the Statue of Liberty that the American ideal is the "hope of all mankind," adding that "the light shines in the darkness...and the darkness will not overcome it." Those who know the Bible, which would presumably include us evangelicals, know that this phrase was lifted straight out of the first chapter of the Gospel of John—only the Apostle John didn't have America in mind when he spoke of the world's illuminating hope.

Our tacit acceptance of such blatant mishandling of the Holy Scriptures raises a number of questions for us. Is it fitting for Christians to remain mum while our world is being told (particularly by one of our own) to put its hope in a nation-state and the power of its myriad horses and chariots? Might it be that we've come to adopt a sort of "mix-and-match" doctrine of salvation, bowing to different saviors for differing contexts? If so, are we content to possess a faith that the world can clearly see as duplicitous or, at best, confused? For if we evangelicals are ambivalent about the source of our salvation, then what in the world is our message? ■

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